

## Thousand and One Nights and Ali Baba and Forty Thieves

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**ABSTRACT.** This article is going to study the adaptation of *Thousand and One Nights* in the movie *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves* directed by Arthur Lubin in 1944 through the lens of adaptation theory. The movie departs heavily from the text of *Thousand and one Nights* to the point that it is a whole different story and owes a great deal to the imagination of Universal Pictures. Since the movie represents the Orient it is a fertile ground for the study of the Orient in the movie. First we study the relationship of the text with the image and second we will study the images of the Orient. Of course the image the movie presents of the Orient is innocent and mild. The movie turns the text on its head in that the movie is the reverse of the text. The plot of the movie is the opposite of the text, whereas in the text it is the forty thieves who are the villains in the movie it is the other way round, the forty thieves befriend Ali Baba and grow him up and they form a resistance against the Mongols.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The theory of adaptation is nowadays a major research in comparative literature discussing the relations of cinema and literature. This theory of adaptation is not merely after proving which one of literature and cinema is more important than the other. It does not consider adaptation as a secondary and derivative term. This theory considers adaptation as important in itself. In this regards I will be discussing Linda Hucheen, and Julie Sanders from whose ideas and thoughts this article benefits a great deal. Linda Hucheen's book *A Theory of Adaptation* has been very beneficial along with Julie Sanders' *Adaptation and Appropriation*. Both Sanders and Hucheen in discussing adaptation place emphasis on the term inter-textuality. They believe that it is the nature of adaptation to be intertextual embroiling more than one text. Therefore, the text of *Thousand and One Nights* is discussed here as an intertext influencing and appearing in many other texts. Likewise adaptation is treated as interdisciplinary which embroil both literature and cinema.

For every adaptation there are a plethora of reasons and motivations. We have to find the motivations of the adaptors when discussing adaptation. Some directors adapt a text because they want to make money out of their adaptation, some do an adaptation to pay tribute to an author. There are social, political, religious, cultural and economic reasons for adapting a text. Since *Thousand and One Night* is an oriental text travelling to the west, it is ineluctable and inexorable not to discuss its adaptations in the light of orientalism. That is to say because it is entwined with the knowledge of the Orient its adaptations take the form of representation. Therefore we will see to the fact that as an oriental work *Thousand and One Nights* is a fertile ground for asking new questions. Viewed in this way, the movie adapted from the text of *Thousand and One Nights* depicts the Orient as an exotic place. They simply represent the orient from the perspective of the adaptors. To discuss orientalism or oriental representations in the movie adaptation of *Thousand and One Nights*, I will focus on the plot and the way the movie depicts the Orient.

Linda Hucheen in her book *A Theory of Adaptation* believes that everyone who has experienced adaptation has his/her own theory of adaptation. Her book *A Theory of Adaptations* tries to think through this ongoing status and the continuous critical condemnation of the over-all phenomenon of adaptation—in all its numerous media manifestations. She condemns those who

consider adaptation as a minor and subsidiary and undoubtedly never as respectable as the original. Hucheson shows a strong interest in what has come to be called “intertextuality” or the dialogic relations among texts, works in any medium are both created and received by people, and it is this human, experiential context that allows for the study of the politics of intertextuality.

Adapted works are ubiquitous. They are not few and far between. Linda Hucheson believes that adaptations are all over the world nowadays, they are found on the television and movie display, ‘on the musical and dramatic stage, on the Internet, in novels and comic books, in theme park and video arcade’. (2004, 2) Adaptations are clearly not novel and fresh to our time, though; Shakespeare conveyed his culture’s tales from written form to stage and made them obtainable to a whole new spectators. It is common knowledge that not only adaptations, but all art is born from other art, and literary works have been breastfed by other literary works. Numerous film, television, or theatre adaptations of recognized works of literature acquiescently announce themselves as an interpretation or re-reading of a canonical predecessor. Every now and then this will include a director’s personal revelation, and it may or may not include cultural rearrangement or updating of some form; sometimes this re-interpretative performance will also encompass the movement into a new standard mode or background. (Sanders, 2006: 2)

Literary works ‘are built from systems, codes and traditions established by previous works of literature’ (Allen 2000: 1). Nevertheless they are also constructed from systems, codes, and backgrounds resulted from companion art forms. As an example the verse drama called *Beatrice Chancy* has breastfed many other works including dramas, romances, chronicles, screenplays, parodies, sculptures, photographs, and operas. If we take the following list of authors which Linda Hucheson mentions in her article ‘In Defence of Literary Adaptation as Cultural Production’ we will see that it has influenced many:

Vincenzo Pieracci (1816), Percy Bysshe Shelley (1819), Juliusz Slowacki (1843), Waldter Landor (1851), Antonin Artaud (1935) and Alberto Moravia (1958); Francesco Guerrazi (1854), Henri Pierangeli (1933), Philip Lindsay (1940), Frederic Prokosch (1955) Susanne Kircher (1976); Stendhal (1839), Mary Shelley (1839), Alexandre Dumas, père (1939-40), Robert Browning (1864), Charles Swinburne (1883), Corrado Ricci (1923), Sir Lionel Cust (1929), Kurt Pfister (1946) Irene Mitchell (1991); Bertrand Tavernier Colo O’Hagan (1988); Kathy Acker (1993); Harriet Hosmer (1857); Julia Ward Cameron (1866); Guido Pannain (1942), Berthold Goldschmidt (1951, 1995) Havergal Brian (1962).

It seems that the authors are sitting around a tablecloth and are eating from that single work and thus producing their own works. It is a kind of intertextual feast by Clarke’s own confession, this rewriting of Beatrice’s story, mainly Percy Bysshe Shelley’s own verse play, *The Cenci*, exemplifies brilliantly what Northrop Frye offered as the first principle of the production of literature that literature can only stem and originate its form from itself. (Hucheson, 2007) which is summed up in the term intertextuality which in the last decades has loomed large. Any examination of the phenomenon of intertextuality, and its precise demonstration in the forms of adaptation and appropriation, is ineluctably engrossed in how art begets art, or how literature is created by literature. Adaptation in the words of Hucheson ‘is a form of intertextuality’. (8) This relation of literature and cinema as intertextual finds expression in comparative literature. Henry Remak’s ideas will be effective here because comparative literature considers the geographical borders artificial and its development includes other spheres of knowledge. Remak writes

Comparative literature is the study of literature beyond the confines of one particular country, and the study of relationships between literature on the one hand and other areas of knowledge and belief, such as the arts (eg, painting, sculpture, architecture, music), the sciences, religion, etc, on the other. in brief, it is the comparison of one literature with another or others, and the comparison of literature with other spheres of human expression. (1961: 1)

Therefore adaptation which is the study of the relationship between literature on the one hand and cinema on the other is one instance of comparative literature. The history of cinema indicates that the famous films and movies are all adapted from literature. In keeping with 1992

statistics, 85 percent of all Oscar-winning Best Pictures are adaptations and adaptations form 95 percent of all the serials and 70 percent of all the TV films of the week that win Emmy Awards.(Hucheon, 2004: 4) of course this does not mean that cinema is parasitical on literature and adaptations are insignificant. It should be noted that this does not mean that all the literary works are suitable for adaptations and adapters are not willing to adapt anything from literature. The adapters will choose those works of literature which are themselves cultural treasures and famous. Hollywood adapts from popular novels, as Ellis names the “tried and tested” or “tried and trusted.” (1982: 3).

Hucheon defines adaptation doubly as process and product. This definition is closer to the collective practice of the term and is comprehensive enough to consider ‘not just films and stage productions, but also musical arrangements and song covers, visual art revisitations of prior works and comic book versions of history, poems put to music and remakes of films, and videogames and interactive art’.(9) she makes distinctions; for instance, references to and transitory reverberations of other works would not succeed as lengthy engagements, nor do most instances of musical sampling, for the reason that they recontextualize only short fragments of music.

Hucheon says ‘it is obvious that adapters must have their own personal reasons for deciding first to do an adaptation and then choosing which adapted work and what medium to do it in. They not only interpret that work but in so doing they also take a position on it’.(92) Therefore as far as interpretation is concern, it means that closeness or faithfulness to the adapted text should not be the standard of judgment or the focus of examination. Hucheon argues that for a long time, “fidelity criticism,” was the critical convention in adaptation studies, specifically when coping with recognized works. Nowadays that supremacy has been questioned from an assortment of viewpoints and with an assortment of consequences.(7) She quotes George Bluestone pointing out that initially when a film becomes a monetary or critical achievement, the issue of its fidelity is given scarcely any thought (ibid). Hucheon believes it seems to be unimportant to engage openly in the continuous debate over degrees of closeness and fidelity to the “original” that has produced those many typologies of adaptation processes: borrowing as opposed to intersection as opposed to transformation; analogy as opposed to commentary as opposed to transposition; using the original text as raw material as opposed to reinterpretation of only the essential narrative structure as opposed to a literal translation. (ibid)

### **Julie Sanders**

Julie Sanders’ book *Adaptation and Appropriation* has been a good source from whose ideas I have benefited a lot. In this book Sanders examines and investigates numerous classifications and practices of adaptation and appropriation, she discusses the cultural and aesthetic politics behind the instinct to adapt. She also talks about varied methods in which current literature and film adapt, look over and re-envision other works of art, the influence of academic schools, like structuralism, post-structuralism, post-colonialism, postmodernism, feminism and gender studies on adaptation. She also explores the adaptation across time and across cultures of particular recognized texts, but also of literary archetypes for example myth or fairy tale.

What is of importance to Sanders is the term intertextuality which she examines in the form of adaptation and appropriation. The discussion of adaptation calls into play the process of intertextuality, of how literature creates literature. She believes the idea that the finding of intertextual reference and allusion as a self-confirming implementation is reasonable enough, quoting Robert Weimann’s phrase ‘reproductive dimension of appropriation’(quoted by Sanders, 1) proposes the various traditions in which texts breastfeed and inform other texts – but, as readers and critics, we also need to recognize that adaptation and appropriation are fundamental to the practice, and, indeed, to the enjoyment, of literature(ibid).

Sanders refers to Roland Barthes professing that ‘any text is an intertext’ (Sanders,2005:2), proposing that the literature of preceding and former cultures were invariably existing in later literature. Barthes likewise placed emphasis on the techniques in which texts were not merely hooked on their authors for the construction of meaning, suggesting how they profited from readers who shaped their own intertextual organisms.(ibid, 2) Julia Kristeva, a product of systematic and

anthropological school influenced by Lévi-Strauss, articulated the term *intertextualité* in her essay 'The Bounded Text' to designate the process by which any text was a transformation of texts, an intertextuality (ibid,17). Kristeva's emphasis was sprang from semiotics; she was absorbed in how texts were pervaded by the signs, signifiers, and words of the culture to which they contributed, or from which they sprung. Intertextuality as a word has, nevertheless, come to denote a far more textual idea set against utterance-driven notion of how texts include and react to other texts both during the procedure of their formation and configuration and in terms of the individual reader's or spectator's reaction.(ibid). In adaptations the intertextual connection may be less obvious, more entrenched, but what is often unpreventable is the fact that a political or moral pledge generates a writer's, director's, or performer's choice to re-interpret a source text.(ibid) Sanders contends that 'modernist poetry practiced intertextuality in the form of quotation, allusion, collage, bricolage, and fragment'.(ibid, 8)

Drawing upon the ideas of Gérard Genette, Sanders uses the term 'hypertext' to equate it with the adaptation and 'hypotext' to the source.(ibid, 6) Sanders discusses *Ulysses* as a powerful hypotxt of the rich potentials of the adaptive method and of analyses attentive to the politics of appropriation, but it is likewise a good example of the sense of play that numerous thinkers have empathize as fundamental to the adaptive instinct.(ibid, 7). She quotes T. S. Eliot suggesting that meaning comes from the connections between texts, connections which stimulate contrast and comparison. Sanders also contends that 'Canonicity is almost a required feature of the raw material for adaptation and appropriation'. (ibid, 120) Directors and filmmakers do not choose any work from literature they choose the ones which are canonical. Adaptation, argues Sanders, both seems to require and to preserve the presence of a canon, while it may in turn contribute to its continuing reformulation and growth.(ibid, 8)

Regarding the canonicity Sanders refers to Derek Attridge contending that the continuation of any canon is reliant in some measure on the allusions made to its former supporters by its later followers or prospective members (ibid, 8-9). The essential 'reading alongside' of original work and adaptation, demands a knowledge on the part of the reader and viewer of the original work when facing the adaptive text. In this regard, adaptation becomes a veritable marker of canonical status; a lot of reference to a canonical, original work infers authority.(ibid, 9)

Sanders believes that adaptation could be described as a characteristically conservative genre. Quoting Attridge arguing that through their regularly explicit *allusiveness* novels present themselves not as assaults to the canon, but as canonic – as already canonized. They seem to place themselves within a recognized literary culture, rather than offering themselves as a challenge to that culture (ibid). Nevertheless, as the idea of antagonistic overthrow present in a term such as 'appropriation' suggests, adaptation can likewise be oppositional, even subversive. There are as numerous chances for departure as devotion, for attack as well as reverence. (ibid)

To the benefit of adaptation, Sander refers to Adrienne Rich's 'When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-vision', first printed in 1971. Making use of Rich's much-cited observation that for women writers it was indispensable to adopt the writing of the past in order to go beyond it into a liberated, imaginative space of their own. She quotes Rich as saying 'Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction ... We need to know the writing of the past and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us' (ibid).

## 2. DISSCUSSION

In the light of Hucheon's and Sanders's theory of adaptation, it is not practical to think about the faithful relationship of the movie *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves* and *Thousand and One Nights*. The question of fidelity is insignificant and wide of the mark here in this analysis. We will discuss the movie in terms of its plot, its main characters and the similarities and differences, Representation of the East which is to be found in the imagery of buying women, passion, harem and veil.

### **Plot of Ali Baba and Forty Thieves**

The plot of the movie revolves around Mongolian conquest of Bagdad by Hulagu Khan (Kurt Katch). The caliph Hassan (Moroni Olsen) has run away confinement, accompanied by his young son Ali (Scotty Beckett), and prepares to reorganize the remaining of his soldiers. Although remaining at the castle of Prince Cassim (Frank Puglia), Ali and Cassim's daughter Amara (Yvette Duguay), being afraid that they will not see each other again, make a nuptial agreement through their blood. Everything is oriental: the clothing, the atmosphere, and the names, except for the language.

When the caliph is ready to go away, Cassim ruins caliph's plan by calling him back and makes him be killed at the hands of the Mongols but his son Ali absconds. Unaccompanied and lost in the desert, he falls upon a mountainside where he watches a throng of riders departing a concealed cave. Learning its opening phrase ("Open, Sesame!"), he arrives in the cave and finds it full of gem. When the 40 thieves come back, they discover the boy dead sleep in their hideout. Upon understanding that he is the offspring of the caliph, and enthralled by his bravery and strength of mind, the thieves permit him to be with them and be their leader, Old Baba (Fortunio Bonanova), accepts him as his son, Ali Baba.

A decade later, the group of thieves have become a troupe of Robin Hood-style resistance fighters, prowling the Mongols and giving to the deprived and browbeaten people. At some point, they find out that a convoy bearing the new fiancée for the Khan to Bagdad, which appears to be rich pickings since it is seemingly only insecurely protected. Ali Baba (Jon Hall), now a full-grown man, nevertheless is doubtful and chooses to watch the caravan first, accompanied by his 'nanny' Abdullah (Andy Devine). The bride appears to be Amara (Maria Montez), Cassim's daughter, who is to be married to the Khan so as to strengthen Cassim's rather wobbly standing with the Mongols.

Meanwhile, Amara chooses to bath in the oasis, where Ali meets her (they do not recognize each other, however). Mistaking her for a mere servant and making her believe he is a traveler, he questions her about the caravan, then more about herself. But then it becomes clear that the caravan is indeed seriously protected; Ali is trapped and apprehended, while Abdullah only just flees. When Ali Baba knows that the 'servant girl' is the fiancée of the Khan, he curses her for her supposed betrayal. Offended by his allegations and in mounting approbation for him and his faith, she requests her servant and bodyguard, Jamiel (Turhan Bey), who admires the 40 thieves, to slake Ali's thirst.

In Bagdad, Ali is shown to the Khan, nevertheless he is not identified as the chief of the forty thieves, and tied to a pillory in the palace square for public hanging the next day. Cassim pays a private visits to him and finds out Ali's true identity, but does not disclose it to anyone. Soon afterwards, the thieves organize Ali Baba's release, nevertheless Old Baba is gravely injured; Amara, who was about to visit Ali to clear the misunderstanding between them, is abducted, and Jamiel alone frees Ali Baba. The thieves depart into Mount Sesame.

The next day, the thieves arrest Jamiel, who was following them. Ali distinguishes him as a comrade, and Jamiel, who pledges loyalty to Ali Baba, is given the role of a mole in the palace. His first mission is to hand in a ransom note to the Khan: in exchange for his bride, Hulagu Khan is to submit the conspirator Cassim. The thieves go to Cassim's house to expect the defector's coming. When Amara comes into the garden, Ali distinguishes her as his lost love, and with his aroused moods for her he chooses to free her without wanting her father. This primarily stimulates the irritation of his troupe, nonetheless they still continue to be faithful to him.

When Amara comes back to Bagdad, her father discloses Ali's real identity to her and the Khan. Hulagu Khan chooses to hold the wedding instantaneously; Amara does not abide, but seeing her father being tortured falsely makes her submit. Jamiel informs Ali, who chooses to release his love. In order to get to the palace unobserved, he invents the strategy to pass himself off as a trader from Basra who carries forty enormous jars of oil as a wedding present. Jamiel comes back to the palace to communicate the strategy to Amara, nonetheless they catch one of her servants snooping. The girl then communicates the news to Cassim and the Khan, who choose to greet Ali in an appropriate fashion.

On the day of marriage, Ali Baba does appear as a trader from Basra and is accepted as a guest. Through an interval, sword dancers appear, who initially perform their routine and then rapidly dive their swords through the jar covers - but the jars have only sand inside. Upon learning of the exposure of the original plan, Ali had decided to make a few modifications: most of the thieves came cloaked in the crowd; some others were concealed in jars which were not brought in front of the Khan.

Hulagu Khan slays Cassim for his disappointment and proclaims Ali's hanging, nonetheless then Jamiel unlocks the revolution by killing Ali's protectors with his throwing blades. While the thieves attack the palace guards, he and Amara open the gates for the mob, which rushes in and suppresses the Mongols. Abdullah kills Hulagu Khan, and Jamiel raises the Arabian flag over the palace's highest tower as a symbol of victory.

### **A Whole Different Story**

The movie, though based on *Thousand and one Nights*, deviates from the text of *Thousand and One Nights* to a great extent. It is a novel story in itself. The setting is Baghdad though the story of Ali Baba is supposed to be in Persia. (Burton, 369) The setting is at the time of the invasion of Baghdad by the Mongols. The story of Ali Baba in the text of *Thousand and One Nights* is completely turned on its head. It is totally reversed. In the story of Ali Baba the process is changed from hostility of the forty thieves to their friendship. It is they in the movie who are helping Ali Baba to revenge himself. The forty thieves are forty friends for Ali Baba and they raise him up and hence Ali Baba. 'Baba' in Persian means 'father' and Ali is the most famous name in Persian culture. Even the name 'Ali Baba' is chosen by the Old Baba the leader of the group.

While in the text of *Thousand and One Nights* the gang is very dangerous and aggressive, the movie they are friends to people and the poor. In the text they are enemy of the people and rob people and wreak havoc in the city and outside of the city. They rob and what they rob is kept inside a magical cave which is opened with the phrase 'open oh sesame' and is closed with the words 'close oh sesame'. In the text of *Thousand and One Nights* the forty thieves are villain and evil but here in the movie it is the other way round. What they do in the text is to massacre and rob people and what they do in the movie is otherwise helping the poor and the deprived. In the text all the forty thieves are killed by Mariana and here in the movie they are acting benevolently and are loved by Ali Baba.

The movie has another person which is also found in the text, that person is Cassim. In the text Cassim is the brother of Ali Baba and is very greedy and dies because of his ambition. (Burton, 1901: 376) The same parallels can be found in the movie in the character of Cassim who is greedy and dies as a consequence of his ambition. The reference to forty jars by which the forty thieves attacked Ali Baba's house in order to kill him are used in the movie to the benefit of Ali Baba as his plan to overthrow and topple the government of the Mongols. Instead of forty thieves inside the jars, there is sand in them.

### **Textual Ali Baba and Visual Ali Baba**

Textual Ali Baba is chalk and cheese with the visual Ali Baba. The textual Ali Baba is a poor person from the Persian and from working-class (Burton: 1901: 369) while the visual Ali Baba is from gentry's class. Visual Ali Baba is the son of the caliph, who is killed by the Mongols. The textual Ali Baba scrapes a living by collecting woods and by some quirk of fates comes upon a cave wherein the thieves heap up their stolen wealth. He takes some of them and is rich beyond the dream of avarice. The textual Ali Baba becomes a respected merchant on account of the wealth he takes from the cave. In fact, the textual Ali Baba gets from a poor state to a rich state while for visual Ali Baba it is quite the opposite because he is the son of a caliph and is reduced to nothing other than being a vagabond after his father is toppled by the Mongols at a time when Ali is only a child.

The visual Ali Baba is there to befriend the forty thieves and become their leader to steal from the Mongols and give to the downtrodden. The visual Ali Baba is a pest for the Mongols to the extent that the Halagu Khan orders 'Ten Thousand pieces of gold for the body of Ali Baba and the

destruction of the band of thieves'. The visual Ali Baba is a freedom fighter. Along with his friends he resists the cruel ruling of Mongols and at the end defeats the Mongols and resumes the caliphate. The textual Ali Baba is not from royal dynasty but one who rises from rags to riches.

### **Representation of the East in *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves***

The mounting body of knowledge coping with the nineteenth-century reception of Sir Richard Burton's rendition of the *Arabian Nights* in English speaking world, and the corpus of adaptation and imitators that it stimulated, has exposed the prominence of these texts in the expansion of European and American ideas of the 'Orient', to use that inaccurate yet ostensibly necessary shorthand to denote the lands, peoples and cultures of a region extending from North Africa through the Middle East and beyond. The great enthusiasm for this material is a surest indication of 'a deep desire to set people's minds free, and a new ability to welcome what was strange and different'(Janathan, 2013:377).

Since the movie *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves* is based on *Thousand and One Nights* a textual oriental work, therefore it is unavoidable to see the images of the Orient in this movie. The movie, unlike the text of *Thousand and one Nights* on which it was based, depicts the forty thieves in a positive sense while in the text they are villains of the story. The shift from villains to heroes on the part of the forty thieves is a major change of the movies. The whole group befriends Ali Baba and nurtures him since Ali Baba is a small child. The group are pitted against the Mongols who are shown as coarse and brutal in the movie. The movie starts in Baghdad in the middle of the war where the Mongols are pitted against the Arabs and they capture Baghdad. The movie revolves around the theme of betrayal of Cassim to the Caliph Hasan. Cassim was Hasan's Wazir but after the fall of Baghdad he shopped him and the Mongols killed Hasan the Caliph of Baghdad and ruled it. Cassim, a sinister Arab character also was to kill Ali the son of Hasan at the hands of the Mongols but failed.

Cassim, the bad Arab, is portrayed as a man of ambition who is ready to betray his friend Caliph so that he can be rewarded by the enemies. He is ready to see Hasan and his family be killed in front of his eyes and he even orders the men to set fire to the boats where Ali is hiding. Of course the plot of the movie requires the depiction of Cassim to be so and he is at the end killed at the hands of Mongols. It is Mongols who are to be considered also as part of the Orient. The movie gives their portrayals as coarse and cruel having no kindness. Of course we have to remember that it is war and we don't expect kindness in times of war. Cassim and the Mongols are the villains of the movie. They are pitted against the good Arabs of the movie, the forty thieves and Ali Baba. The Mongol are portrayed as boisterous and having a defining interest in war.

The Arab portrayed in this movie is innocent and mild. In fact, as in the words of Jack Shaheen, this movie gives 'fabulous image' of Arabs(2012: 42). There is no severe stereotypical images of the Arabs in this very movie except in the fact that the movie shows men as having no regard for women. Of course not all the men. When Ali Baba and his gang are going to swap Amira for her father Ali Baba does break his bond since he comes to understand that the woman to be exchanged is, in fact, his love Amira. He changes horse in mid-stream. The group protest as to why he should regard the woman so highly. There is a conversation between Ali Baba and one of his members of the group:

**Abdullah:** why all this fuss about one woman? For a Thousand pieces of gold, you can buy the best in the market.

**Ali Baba:** For a Thousand pieces of gold? I bid my life for lady Amara.

**Abdullah:** For a man's country or his stomach, he might bid his life, even for his horse. Never, never for a woman.

**Ali Baba:** I do not ask the life of a single thief to save her but if I choose to give my own, it's between me and Allah.

**Jamil:** I will go with you.

**Abdullah:** What, you two would storm the walls of Baghdad and attack the Mongol army single-handed? You would break into the palace and carry off the wench?

A degree of stereotyping of Arabs is evident in the above conversation. This sentence shows that the Arabs are portrayed as having no regards for women. This is shown in the character of Abdullah as is shown in the conversation above. Abdullah as an Arab adult has no regards for any woman and in fact the world of forty thieves is a masculine world with masculine ideas of bravery and resistance. The word 'wench' in the conversation is used to confirm the degree of stereotyping of Arab men are portrayed in the film. For Abdullah women are less important than horses. From his vantage point horses are worth more than women. On the other hand Ali Baba is shown to be good to women and is ready to bid his own life for the sake of Amara. The movie romanticizes and valorizes the relationship between Ali Baba and Amara. The Oriental Mongols are shown as dictators who are represented as aggressive and worrisome. Halagu Khan, the historical personage is shown to be a dictator who does not care for the love of Ali Baba and Amara and is ready to make Amara his queen at the cost of all his property.

### **Buying women**

The movie presents the oriental men as buying women in their marriages. This is misrepresentation. When an Arab or any other man falls in love he does not buy a woman. In the movie the cliché thing about marriage is that Orientals buy their wives. This buying is so common in the movie that everybody uses the monetary language about marriage and it does not seem to be unusable in the film. However, it appears awkward to the oriental people themselves when watching this movie. Every woman has a price the movie implies. In the movie there is a situation when Ali Baba sees Amara for the first time and immediately falls in love with her and starts praising her. The audience already know that he is pledged to Amara through blood and should not fall in love with any other woman. This, however, is another stereotype of the Orient who is shown to easily fall in love with as many women as possible. Ali Baba praises Amara not knowing who she is. What is interesting is that he immediately uses pecuniary gesture and language. Let's take that conversation into consideration.

**Ali Baba** If I had a thousand pieces of gold, I would give them all for you.

**Amara:** A thousand pieces of gold? That's not enough. My price is high. (00:23:57)

As the conversation shows both Ali Baba and Amara know that it is usual to use the word 'gold' for buying a woman. The movie also makes normal that in the orient it is normal to buy a woman for yourself, as if women are foods available on the market. This is true about slaves, not beautiful women who belong to the gentry, with whom an Oriental Arab falls in love. This is a kind of stereotyping the Arabs. The buying imagery or motif once again surges up when Abdullah exactly uses one thousand piece of fold for buying a woman from the market when he see Ali Baba is so adamant about having Amara for himself. Though marriage is a contract, the use of marriage is a euphemism in order to respect women. In the case of Lady Amara who is not a slave, and who belongs to the gentry, the case of market seems way off base.

### **Pretext for Passion**

Ellah Shohat has argued that Hollywood's Orient becomes an excuse for eroticized images, particularly from 1934 through the mid-1950s when the preventive production code prohibited portraying "scenes of passion" in all but the most immature terms and required that the sacredness of the institution of marriage be preserved permanently. In *Taboo memories, diasporic voices* she writes: "Miscegenation, nudity, sexually suggestive dances or costumes, "excessive and lustful kissing" were prohibited; illicit sex, seduction, or rape could only be suggested, and then only if absolutely essential to the plot and if severely punished at the end". (2006: 47)

### **Harem, Veil**

The predominant images of Arab women in *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves* include erotic, romanticized, and sexualized ones. The romanticized oriental woman herself tells "I feed on the curiosity of foolish men. I distract the thoughts of men and lead them in the ways of mischief" (00:22:41). The image of the women finds expression in the imagery of harem and veil. A propos of images of harem girls in the movie, they are portrayed as spy, helpless, silent, and utterly



portrayed as dominated by an Oriental patriarchy (Halagu Khan). The spy image finds expression in the girl serving Amara who is in fact a spy for Cassim. The silent ones are those who people the harem who are portrayed as submissive, silent and obeying the rules of Halagu Khan. The first veiled woman we see in the film is the woman in the house of Cassim who is the maid to little Amara who calls out for the little lady Amara. She is not recognizable to the viewers because she is wearing a veil which covers her face. We only hear her voice. This is misrepresentation indeed because the Arab women used to wear veils outdoors not indoors.

Harem is another motif which frequently happens in all the movies of the *Nights*, and this adaptation is not an exception. Harem's frequent use gestures to the reputation of orientalist portrayals of Arab womanhood. In this movie the harem of Halagu Khan is the place with a lot of woman serving the Oriental king represented as a corporeal and sexual body possessing a lot of women at his disposable through whom he can quench his sexual desires.

### 3. CONCLUION

Artur Lubin's adaptation while deviating from the text of *Thousand and One Nights*, repeats certain traditional tropes in their representation of the Oriental other. Although almost all this adaptation relies on Western stereotypes of the Orient, in general these stereotypes seem quite gentle. This movie shares a repertoire of visual cliché about the Orient. Regardless of the frequent appearance of sinister Cassim and cruel Mongols in this film, the Orient portrayed is to a great extent an innocent place. Furthermore, this movie give a romantic view of the Orient too. As this brief analysis of Arthur Lubin's adaptation shows the movie based on the *Nights* valorizes and romanticizes the Orient as well as giving mild stereotypical images of the Orient. Furthermore we recognize that adaptation and appropriation of *Arabian Nights* in the form of the film *Ali Baba and Forty Thieves* have been fundamental to the practice, and, undeniably, to the enjoyment, of literature itself.

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